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**TURKMENISTAN**

## SUCCESS STORY

# Childhood Illnesses Get a Second Look

### **Evidence-based Approaches Are Making a Difference for Turkmenistan's Youngest Generation**



*Family Physicians in Lebap Velayat Practice Newly Learned Skills.  
Photo: ZdravPlus*

***The USAID ZdravPlus and Healthy Family Projects have been working with the Ministry of Health since 2002 to implement the WHO-recommended Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses strategy to improve the health of children in Turkmenistan.***

Aysoltan Halitova, a family physician from Mary Velayat, recently took part in the 12-day the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI) training, supported by USAID's ZdravPlus project. The IMCI strategy focuses on home care for the majority of cases, with more serious symptoms addressed in the outpatient primary care setting and only the most serious cases referred for inpatient hospital care. When children become ill, incorrect or unnecessary treatment can mean prolonged sickness and in some cases death from conditions that are often easily treatable. By providing doctors with evidence-based tools to assess and manage common conditions in children under age five, the IMCI strategy aims to reduce the most common causes of death among young children.

Doctor Halitova was understandably skeptical about using the IMCI as it is much different from the way physicians manage child illness in Turkmenistan. The traditional approach recommends decreased food and drink and encourages referrals to specialists, hospitalization, and use of multiple drugs in treatment of even simple conditions like diarrhea. Nevertheless, Aysoltan decided to give the new methods a try when her own son got pneumonia. She was pleased to see that her son's infection quickly cleared up; Aysoltan is now using IMCI-recommended treatments on all of her young patients.

Aysoltan Halitova is just one of the nearly 800 physicians who have been trained in IMCI with USAID assistance. Until recently, USAID was providing trainings in two etraps in each of the five country's velayats. At the Ministry of Health's request, the training is expanding to include doctors from other etraps as well.

The USAID ZdravPlus and Healthy Family Projects have been working with the Ministry of Health of Turkmenistan since 2002 to implement the IMCI strategy in the country. USAID's projects support trainings for doctors and nurses, introduction of IMCI into the medical education system, and informing parents through community outreach activities.

Thanks to the Ministry of Health and multilateral support for the IMCI strategy, positive changes are taking place in health care to benefit Turkmenistan's children. A survey carried out in 2005 shows that the majority of the re-trained physicians are putting the IMCI approaches into practice. There is also evidence that the health of children in the pilot etraps is improving; the number of preventative visits to PHC facilities have increased while the visits for treatment and hospital referrals have decreased.